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ABSTRACT

This article argues that the traditional classroom may provide little opportunity for English-as-a-Second-Language teachers to learn about the lives of their students. Drawing on ethnographic research in Philadelphia's Hmong community, an attempt is made to demonstrate how teachers can get a distorted picture of their students and how their students live. One teachers'experiences with three Hmong individuals illustrate how such assumptions can be challenged when the teacher has the opportunity to see these individuals in the context of their own communities. The intellectual climate is examined, Which allows a new view of literacy, where the emphasis is shifted from cognitive consequences to an interest in literacy in social context as a means through which relationships are negotiated, is examined. It is argued that the ideal classroom is one in which both teachers and students have the opportunity to learn about how the world looks through the other's eyes. Suggestions are made to teachers for creating an English-as-a-Second-Language classroom setting where they can discover more about the role of literacy in their students' lives and where students can both identify and expand the contexts in which literacy can create meanings for them. (Author/MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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FROM PROBLEM-SOLVING TO CELEBRATION:
DISCOVERING AND CREATING MEANINGS THROUGH LITERACY

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ABSTRACT

From Problem-solving to celebration:

Discovering and creating meanings through literacy

This article attempts to demonstrate the ways in which a classroom teacher can get a very distorted picture of students and their resources. Drawing on ethnographic research in Philadelphia's Hmong community, the author illustrates the ways in which her own assumptions were challenged, specifically about three individuals who she came to know in context of their communities.

Next, this article looks at the intellectual climate which has permitted a new view of literacy, where the emphasis has shifted from cognitive consequences to an interest in literacy in social context as a means through which relationships are negotiated.

Finally, it is argued that the ideal classroom is one in which both teachers and students have the opportunity to learn about how the world looks through one another's eyes. Suggestions are made to teachers for creating in their ESL classrooms a setting in which they can discover more about the role of literacy in their students lives, and where students can both identify and expand the contexts in which literacy can create meanings for them.

From problem-solving to celebration:

Discovering and creating meanings through literacy

We ESL teachers are an enigmatic lot. As the heading on a TESOL notepad quips, [we] are not in it for the money! We have chosen a profession in which one of our hats is that of host or hostess- providing newcomers with language tools and information for getting around in our home turf. Most of us enjoy our role as helpers, often becoming the first confidante, problem-solver and advocate that our students may turn to in their transition to coping with their new environment. On the other hand, many of us are drawn to TESL because of our interest in other cultures, and our desire to learn about the world. Each student in our classroom is an ambassador- a window to another place, another culture. Each interaction is an opportunity for considering another world view, for travelling (figuratively) to another corner of the planet, another stretch of human landscape. While our energies and our government programs focus increasingly on the former mission as we teach for survival competencies, the latter quest goes largely ignored. I will argue here that the traditional classroom may provide little opportunity to learn about the lives of our students, resulting in a picture of their resources that may be quite distorted. I will suggest that the constraints on our roles as learners and travellers in turn limits our effectiveness as hosts and helpers.

What do we see when we look at students in the language classroom? How does this relate to their lives outside the classroom? What resources do students need and what resources do

they bring to their adapation to life in a new country? To explore these questions, I share with readers some very brief glimpses of three Hmong refugees in Philadelphia whom I came to know quite well.[1]

A hilltribe from Laos, Hmong people began arriving in the United States beginning in 1979. One resource that Hmong people bring with them to their new lives is a highly developed clan organization that served them as fighters and survivors (See Dunnigan 1982, Weinstein-Shr in press). A resource that is much less well developed among these refugees is experience with print. This poses interesting challenges to the ESL teacher. As the reader meets these two men and one woman below, I hope to demonstrate how my first impressions as a language teacher were challenged substantially as I learned about each person and the contexts within which they operated.

Pao Joua Lo, Bao Xiong and Chou Chang: first impressions[2]

I first met Pao Joua Lo[3] in my English classroom at the local community college in 1979. An older man with an

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[1] I came to know these individuals during the period from 1979 to 1985, first, as an English teacher, and later while I was conducting ethnographic research on literacy and social process. The research consisted of a community profile which included interviews of each Hmong household head in Philadelphia, as well as three in-depth portraits of individuals in the community. For more on the research itself, see Weinstein-Shr (1986). For more on conflicts concerning my role as teacher versus researcher in relation to these three individuals, see Weinstein-Shr (1988).

[2] Some of the material presented in the following section is also discussed in Weinstein-Shr (1988).

[3] All names have been changed to protect privacy.

unexplained limp, he seemed to be one of those "basket cases" that underpaid part-time ESL teachers are ill-equipped to attend when coping with large classes. Sporting dark sunglasses that hid any clues to his engagement in the class, Pao Joua always sat quietly in the back of the classroom. He never spoke, never completed a homework assignment, and never passed an exam. Because the bits of in-class writing that I could muster from him were characterized by awkward shaky handwriting, I assumed that Pao Joua, like many of the other subsistance farmers who had come from the mountains of Laos, was not literate in any language.

I encountered Bao Xiong the same year in the college's language lab. While our contact was brief, this middle age woman made an impression that was strong and lasting. Unlike most Hmong women I had met, Bao did not wear her hair in the characteristic twist bound by a barrette, but rather let it fall loose around her shoulders. Unlike her female compatriots, Bao was talkative and friendly. At the end of the semester, she gave me a silk bookmark with the word "Hmong" embroidered at the top in delicate stitches so I would "remember us Hmong people". With literacy skills near zero, her prospects for passing a reading or writing course were quite dim.

Not surprisingly, Pao Joua and Bao Xiong were both to drop out of school eventually. I did not realize then that I would come to know them very well, and that my perspectives on them would change radically. The reader will meet them again shortly.

I now bring the reader's attention to a third person, a man in his mid twenties. I first met Chou Chang at a Lutheran church service where he was assisting the pastor by reading passages to the mixed Hmong and American congregation from a Lao bible. Having completed four years of schooling in Laos before becoming a soldier at the age of 12, Chou was literate in Lao, and increasingly in English. He also taught himself how to read and write Hmong after arriving in the United States. At the time I met him he was working his way through a high school equivilency program.

At Chou's invitation, I visited him and his wife Sai at their home in a run-down section of Weston[4]. When I arrived at the only apartment in tact at the end of the burned out row, Chou welcomed me warmly and unhesitatingly asked me to stay for dinner. Having heard that Americans eat bread instead of rice, Chou asked Sai to place half a loaf of Wonderbread on my bowl. He was anxious to please. Later that year I would ask him for help.

Functions and Uses of Literacy

In 1980 I was hired to teach literacy classes for a group of Hmong men and women. As attention was turning from grammatical to functional approaches in ESL, the focus of classroom activities and materials for adult refugees was on literacy for everyday situations. I observed my new neighbors closely. While

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[4] Neighborhood names are also ficticious.

my state-of-the-art ESL books introduced these adults to supermarket food labels, they were buying their meat and rice wholesale and growing their own vegetables. As they practiced holding the pencil for the simulation welfare forms in their textbooks, it became increasingly clear that their school-age children had become the family form-fillers. What did Hmong adults need literacy for? What problems did they need to solve that required literacy skills? As a concerned teacher, I wanted to know. To find out, I turned to Chou Chang.

In January of 1981 I arranged to move in with Chou and Sai for four weeks to study the Hmong language, and to observe at close range the ways in which literacy operated in this family's life. Some of my hunches were confirmed or elaborated, and other observations gave me cause for reflection. First, as I had seen in our first encounter, Chou used literacy skills in his job as the pastor's helper. In this role, he performed readings and delivered Sunday school lessons in Hmong to new arrivals. The pastor counted on Chou to mediate between the Hmong and Americans in the congregation both through these formal tasks, as well as by interpreting informally as needed. Fridays and Saturdays in the Chang household were devoted to bible study and preparation for his role in bridging the culture gap on Sunday morning.

During the week, Chou used literacy to get through school, patiently plodding through hours of grammatical exercises (i.e. changing 40 sentences such as the following from the active to the passive construction: "A designer in Paris named Louis

Reardon first presented the bikini at a fashion show in 1946"). Chou was obviously determined to succeed, and would use the literacy skills he had to achieve his equivilency diploma.

Chou also used these skills to cope with a bureaucracy that had immediate control over this life, scrambling for benefits he was entitled to. Because some of the hoops were enormous, his decoding skills would prove crucial in jumping through them in time. One Wednesday afternoon, for example, Chou received a letter requiring him to get signatures on a form from three different offices around the city, and to present the form by that Friday, signing it in front of the case worker, lest his "case" be "closed". In the time normally spent doing homework exercises, Chou fixed his bicycle so he could get the needed signatures the next day. He called his teacher to explain why he would miss his Thursday exam. According to the letter, Sai was also to sign it in the caseworker's presence. On Friday, Chou and Sai made trips in shifts to alternate child care while the other went to provide the solumnly witnessed signatures.

Finally, Chou used his literacy skills to help non-literate neighbors scramble through <u>their</u> tangles of paper for the benefits that <u>they</u> were entitled to, thus acting as a literacy broker. One neighbor asked for help getting money for gas. In return, she let Chou and Sai use her oven to cook their meat. Other requests caused conflict. A young man living several blocks away asked Chou to write a a fraudulent letter to welfare, avowing that he lived with him so that he could pick up a welfare

check at Chou's address. Because Chou was among few adults with the literacy skills to pull it off, a Hmong social worker from the same clan as the young man called to pressure Chou into compliance. "He want me to cheat for him", Chou complained. "He not my relative, he never help me anything. He just make trouble for me." Americans who knew Chou tried to persuade him not to do it. As the phone continued to ring, and Chou's homework lay neglected, he shouted in exasperation, "Too many calls! Too many questions!" With that, he pulled the phone wires out of the wall and sat down to do his homework, compalining, "Everybody want something from me!" While problem-solving once occurred wholly with families and clans, new categories such as caseworker/ client, co-tenant or urban neigbor pose new possibilities and pressures for different kinds of interaction in this new setting.

In a party I organized for Sai and her friends to display and sell their exquisite handicrafts in my home[5], I found that the women were reluctant to pool their resources for a collective effort. Chou explained: "We not trust money together. My name Chang, I help Chang (his clan name)". Chou often complained of his isolation. "I have no relatives [clansmen] here, I just have

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[5] At these gatherings in my apartment, seeds were sown for a language and literacy project based on selling crafts. What bgan as an explanation of the arithmetic needed to figure out the cost of sharing refreshment costs, gradually expanded to the cooperative creation of flyers to advertise the sales, taping of customer/artist conversations to analyse and practice appropriate responses, labeling of merchandise, and eventually writing (as a group) materials for shoppers about the background of the Hmong and the story of their migration to the U.S.

my church". Yet because of his literacy skills, Chou was now often asked for help from neighbors and others who would ordinarily have solved problems within their clans. In a climate of changing relationships, Chou's literacy skills were creating for him a new role in a community where he had no kin.

The functions and uses of literacy for Chou Chang are summarized in the table below, with consequences for his role in the community.

Insert Table I here

A couple of years later, I told my Hmong teacher that I wanted to meet a family with three generations in the household. He told me of his (clan) brother, a community leader living in the Norton neighborhood. This man had been nominated as president of the Hmong Association, he explained, but had declined because of his poor English skills. Nevertheless, Many came to him for help, I was told, especially about family and community disputes. Intrigued, I asked my teacher to arrange a visit and to introduce us. To my surprise, the leader was none other than Pao Joua Lo, the "basket case" from my Community College classroom.

The first thing a visitor notices on entering Pao Joua's home is the large framed photograph of Pao Joua in military fatigues, standing next to Vang Pao, the number one leader of the Hmong in the United States. A ranking officer, Pao Joua is seen by the Hmong as a war hero. The limp I had noticed years earlier was the result of being shot during combat. To learn more about

this family, I offered to provide English tutoring. Pao Joua was not interested, but the women in the family were delighted with the prospect. I arranged to come twice per week.

During my lessons with the women, I often watched through the corner of my eye as Pao Joua engaged in a stream of literacy related activities at his table by the window. Allowing slits of light to enter through the blinds, Pao Joua spent hours flipping through books, magazines and newspapers. To my surprise, Pao Joua was literate in Hmong and Lao. His ways of using literacy were unlike those I had seen in the lives of Chou Chang or Bao Xiong.

When Pao Joua had a book or magazine in hand, it was clear that he leafed through with an obvious goal. He was notably drawn to photographs of powerful leaders. It was clear which leaders attracted him most. "Reagan very good man", he smiles. "Very strong against Communism". With that, he carefully cut the photo out and laid it aside. One evening, Philadelphia's police commissioner Sambourn appeared on the evening news in connection with his decision to bomb a rowhouse in which the MOVE cult was barricaded. The result was the burning of an entire neighborhood. "This kind of leader use nuclear bombs. Very strong against enemies", Pao Joua noted. That pleased him.

From magazines, newspapers, old reader's digest almanacs and other materials, Pao Joua created a series of scrapbooks. In one book made from an a 1979 "desk diary" that he had found at a porch sale, Pao Joua arranged each page to display a photograph

of a leader that he admired. Thatcher, Begin and Gandhi were among those who earned a page in his book. While some captions were included, English text was kept to a minimum. Pao Joua's fascination with powerful leaders is in keeping with his own stature as a soldier and a military strategist. The other collections are described and considered below.

Pao Joua used his literacy skills in the elaborate creation of personal chronicals. A series of albums including photos from the refugee camp to apartment buildings in Minneapolis and Philadelphia among other cities chronical the flight and arrival of members of the extended Lo family to the U.S. Each photo has a small strip of paper with Hmong words attached below it. "The first person here is Pao Joua, next is General Vang Pao..." Pao Joua's attention to detail and interest in chronicaling the story began long before the his arrival in the United States.

Among the other scrapbooks and materials Pao Joua eventually showed me, there was a "life story", with a detailed account of Pao Joua's days as a soldier in Laos. There are Britannica Books of the Year for 1971, 72 and 74 with sections on the Vietnam war highlighted in yellow. Some of the men in the encyclopedia accounts were also in his personal chronicals. Pao Joua's interest in documenting history was exemplified by an old and yellowed steno pad with his own version, in careful Lao lists, of the history of French and U.S. intervention in Laos.

With albums, scrapbooks, reference materials and personal journals, Pao Youa created a rich and varied chronicle. He

expressed satisfaction in knowing that his efforts will help his children to understand the country from which they came and the events leading to their flight and relocation in their new home. They will surely also come to gain some understanding of their father's role in the historic saga.

Pao Joua's interests are not confined to the distant past. He typically scoured both magazines and newspapers for all sorts of topics. With the stimulous of pictures and charts he found in the media (he rarely responded to English text alone), Pao Joua asked me about topics ranging from our policies on terrorism (thanks to a diagram of how the Achille Laural was highjacked) to the American system of government. It was clear, however, that reports on POWs, or other news of the war in Southeast Asia were the most prevalent target of his scissors.

Pao Joua's efforts are not a private hobby. At a party that Pao Joua hosted for his brother's child (a sort of cultural equivilent to a Christening), it became clear that Pao Joua's interest in current news events was integral to his role in the community as an expert on world events, both past and present. At the end of the meal, as is the routine at these large gatherings, the dining room table was cleared, and women and children disappeared to the kitchen and second floor while men gathered for talk and beer. Pao Joua produced several documents to be passed around the table. The first batch was a series of news articles from American and Lao newspapers. Men gathered in clusters around the few literates among them to collectively read

and react to them. Next, a series of letters was passed around, with correspondance (in the Lao language) between Pao Joua and staff at a California-based headquarters that was organizing the resistance from the American side. Discussion centered around the return to Laos to fight to regain the homeland. One of the young men at the gathering was already planning his return in the next few weeks.

Finally, a striking use of literacy by Pao Joua was in the attempt to revive and preserve oral tradition. Members of the Norton community were very concerned about the growing scarcity of traditional linguistic skills for courtship, for negotiating marriages, and for singing appropriate funeral songs that will ensure the safe passage of the spirit as a living person makes the transition to becoming an ancestor. Elders who ordinarily passed these skills on to younger men were selected against in the grueling escape from Laos. The few who made it to Philadelphia complained of exhaustion from so much travelling and drinking at their age, important parts of their specialties. There was clearly a need for special efforts to recruit and train apprentices. Toward this end, Pao Joua was instrumental in helping the Hmong Association set up classes for teaching the oral tradition. Ironically, the elders now were poised at the front of classrooms, where their younger charges listened with pens and notebooks in hand. Pao Joua joined his sons and other Norton neighbors, using literacy to preserve oral tradition with

new tools and new ways of remembering that had become available in their transition to a literate setting.

The table below summarizes the functions and uses of literacy for Pao Joua Lo, as well as the roles that are entailed in these uses.

Insert Table II here

Survival Resources

Bao Xiong, the woman who had dropped out of Community College not long before, was to reappear on the scene as soon as she got wind of the craft sales at my house. "Do you remember me? Can I come too?" she asked, after her son had tracked me down and reached me on the phone. While Bao Xiong was unable to read text, she was a pro at reading the American shopper's heart:

> You like this one? This one tell story about Hmong culture. This show old custom, you see? Hmong lady cut rice like that. Yeah, this one show Hmong people live in Laos. How long? This take **looong** time. Everything I do by my hand. So maybe take three weeks, [if I] work all day every day. But I not time so maybe take four weeks, five weeks, like that.[6]

By 1984, Bao had begun to run a craft business out of her own house. Remembering my strategy for the sales in my home, she asked me to help her make fliers to advertise her wares. By late the next year, Bao was at a craft exhibit at the local

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[6] From a recorded conversation between Bao and a browser at a craft party in 1983.

university, displaying crafts and handing out business cards with her own name, her husband's last name (not typical Hmong practice), and the slogan "traditional Hmong handicrafts" printed boldly across the bottom. At her next "Christmas Sale", where she served "free Hmong food" as advertised on her fliers, I was astonished to find her house jammed with people. A "Guest Book" was open for visitors to sign in; there were already at least 100 entries which Bao's second son had converted into a mailing list.

The functions and uses of literacy described above for Bao Xiong are briefly summarized in Table III below.

Insert Table III here

Without literacy skills in any language, Bao Xiong had mobilized an entire corps of literacy helpers, including sons and ESL teachers among others, to enable her to follow her unflappable entreprenurial instincts. Although she did not control the technology of literacy, Bao had a well-developed knowledge of its uses and possibilities.

Neighbors and networks: social resources for problem-solving

Chou Chang, Pao Joua Lo and Bao Xiong use literacy in different ways for different purposes. Chou Chang uses literacy skills to create new relationships and to build a bridge from his native culture to the culture that he fiercely hopes to join. Bao Xiong also uses literacy for creating new relationships, but her focus is specific to the success of her business. Pao Joua Lo, on the other hand, is far more interested in using literacy to remain connected to the past, to support tradition, and to

strengthen the possibilities for the surivival of Hmong cultural forms. These uses of literacy are not accidental: rather they reflect patterns in the wider Hmong community which have important consequences for the kinds of problems that people have to solve and the means they have available for solving them.

Chou Chang, like many of his compatriots in Weston, complains of his lack of nearby kin. A chart of his social network, created by mapping those to whom Chou has turned to solve a problem who have visited more than two times over a six month period is shown below:

Insert Chart I

Note that many of the actors in Chou's life do not know one another, and are related to him through institutional roles. Many of the problems Chou has to solve are tackled with the help of caseworkers, or through helpers at his church. Like others in Weston, Chou was anxious to incorporate Americans into his network. In 1981 a wave of violence swept Philadelphia in the heat of summer. Perhaps because of their reluctance to retaliate, the Hmong were the primary targets. When an exodus ensued, Chou and Sai were among the migrants. Although he himself was not the victim of an attack, because of his lack of kin support, Chou felt particularly vulnerable. "Anything happen to me, nobody help me. I have no relatives here". The couple now live with their six children in Wisconsin.

For Pao Joua Lo, however, the network is far denser. Like many other families in Norton, the men who visit and who help one

another in solving problems are kin who visit frequently, fish together, share in the buying of pigs for community celebrations, and, in general, cooperate often in a variety of ways.

Insert Chart II

Hang Chou, the president of the Hmong Association (top of chart), has a son who is married to Pao Joua's daughter. This creates a kin relationship that ties the Hang and Lo clans in reciprocal obligations and responsibilities. In his position as president of the Association, Hang can often intervene on certain kinds of problems, making it unnecessary for Pao Joua to interact with the American bureaucracy. Chou Koua is a shaman who looks after many of the spiritual (and thus health) needs of his clan brothers. The group as a whole cooperates for solving a variety of small and large problems. While others can depend on Pao Joua for information on current events or for advice on domestic conflict, Pao Joua has a host of bilingual kin who can solve problems requiring English language and literacy skills. In 1986, it was Pao Joua's turn to use his kin money pool for the down payment on a Norton rowhome.

A community survey conducted during 1984 and 1985 indicated that Chou Chang and Pao Joua Lo were typical, in many ways, of their neighbors. Among the differences between members of the Norton and Weston sub-communities are the structure of networks and the means of solving problems. These characteristics are summarized below:

Insert Table IV

While Pao Joua and Chou behave in ways consistent with their sub-communities, Bao's network is more enigmatic. With her father and brothers close by, she is comfortably surrounded by kin. One brother is a social worker who can help solve bureaucratic problems. Bao has organized the wives of her brothers among other women to put together an impressive craft collection. This part of her network is dense and multiplex, like those from Norton. On the other hand, Bao has cultivated an army of American contacts, including teachers, culture students, craft enthusiasts and buyers, similar to those of Weston. These two networks are largely separate: the members of each do not know one another.

Insert Chart III

It is fitting that as business exploded, Bao used her newfound financial resources to buy a home in the suburbs- outside of either neighborhood.

Three individuals: new perspectives

The contrasts in the lives of these three adults illustrates that literacy has different meanings for different people even within one ostensibly homogeneous community (in this case, the "Hmong community"). The contrasts also illuminate the way in which social contexts determine both the kinds of literacy activity that will take place and the meaning it has for participants. A person whose social network is comprised of kin is likely to have a rich pool of resources that will be at his/her disposal. When many kin are involved, the relationships

are multiplex, assuring a variety of means of reciprocity. In the case of Norton Hmong, dense and multiplex networks permit a division of labor in which specialists can be relied upon for negotiation with institutions, or for solving other literacy-related problems. Services can be repaid with cooking at special occasions, with contributions toward bride price, or in any number of ways that kin support one another.

A person who has a network that is less dense, with relationships that are singular, has to work harder to get a particular problem solved. Problems cannot be casually brought up while fishing, but rather must be addressed in a telephone call specifically for that purpose. Such a person has less means at his/her disposal to reciprocate, and therefore must turn to institutional relationships to get things done. The costs can be considerable for depending on people with whom one does not have a trusting or long-term relationship. In situations where networks are less dense and multiplex, relationships may be less stable. It is not surprising that the troubled summer of 1981 resulted in the exodus and dispersion of most of Weston, while Norton remained in tact.

As a result of the instability of helping groups, literacy becomes a commodity which is needed by each family that is faced with solving its own problems. Without specialists in advocacy positions, literacy is a critical tool for survival in a dangerous world of bureaucracy.

When I first met Pao Joua in my classroom, I could only see him as a dismally failing student with no hope for making it. Bao Xiong, while agressively sociable, was also not able to hold her own academically at the college. Chou Chang, on the other hand, was the visible success story: a pastor's helper. He plodded through schooling, allocating the time and resources necessary to trudge through enigmatic grammar exerxises, learn the rules of classroom behavior, and come out with a high school equivelency degree.

The teacher who met these individuals in the traditional classroom would have missed much. She could never have imagined the kinds of resources at the command of the two older students. She could not have imagined the difficulties faced by the "star" pupil whose feeling of total vulnerability led to his eventual flight. New ways of looking are required in order to see.

Seeing with new eyes

Many scholars have been advocating new ways of looking at literacy. While cross-cultural studies of literacy were often aimed at discovering cognitive consequences (i.e. Olson 1977, Goody and Watt 1968, Ong 1982), increasing attention has been given to the variety of literacies and the social context in which reading and writing take on communicative meaning. Challenges to traditional ways of thinking have been made by historians (i.e. Schofield 1968, Graff 1979), psychologists (i.e. Scribner and Cole 1981), and social scientists who are interested in educational issues (i.e. Street 1984, Heath 1983). With a

shift in focus, it becomes possible to examine literacies, in all their variety, and the functions and uses that they have in the lives of people who use them.

For the social scientist, this shift in focus away from a monolithic view of Literacy as a finite set of decoding skills that can simply be "obtained" has meant viewing literacy (or literacies) as a set of communicative means through which human relationships are negotiated. With this shift, it becomes impossible to ignore power structures, entailing the larger possibilities and constraints within which learners make their choices. Thus, the nature of human relationships and the ways in which they are negotiated through the medium of language and literacy become problematic and interesting.

A shift in interests has resulted in new conceptual frameworks with associated appropriate investigative tools. One framework specifically suited to examining the organization of language behavior has been developed by contributors to the "ethnography of speaking" approach. Hymes (1972) developed the notion of speech situations, speech events and speech acts as conceptual tools to facilitate description and taxonomy of speech behavior. Applications of this approach specifically to the study of literacy were developed by Basso (1974), Szwed (1981) and Heath (1982) whose contributions demonstrated the ways in which literacy could be examined as a mode of communication embedded in human discourse. Heath's notion of "literacy event", or any occasion in which a piece of writing is "integral to the

nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes" (1982: page #?) has been particularly useful in stimulating research on the ways literacy functions in real people's lives.

One consequence of a stance in which the functions and uses of literacy are made problematic has been a host of studies that challenge educators' notions about "at-risk" children and their families or communities (Auerbach 1989). For example, recent research has challenged the notion that language minority students come from literacy-impoverished homes where education is not valued or supported (Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988, Chall and Snow 1982); that family literacy involves a one-way transfer of skills from parents to children (Tizard, Schofield and Hewison 1982, U Mass Literacy Project 1989); or that school success of children is determined by parents' ability to support and extend school-like activities in the home (Chall and Snow 1982, Taylor 1983).

Other research indicates that some of our assessments reveal more about those in authority and their agendas than about students and their resources. Fiering (1981) documents how children are labeled as unable to read while they furiously pass elaborate notes to one another under their desks. Gilmore (1984) documents elaborate ways in which literacy knowledge is interwoven into Black children's "Steppin" games on the playground, echoing how certain skills and behaviors go

unacknowledged, or simply do not "count" for those who are in a power position to assess and evaluate.

For teachers of language and literacy, seeing with new eyes creates new challenges for understanding the meanings and the potential meanings that language can embody in our students' lives. If our goal is to facilitate language development that is useful for our students' own ends, it becomes important to have mechanisms for discovering those ends, and for imagining (or helping our students to imagine) the possibilities that language and literacy can play in their own pursuit of their goals. For the ESL teacher, this is both a challenge and a delight. Who else has the world at their feet in the lives and experiences of their students?

How can a teacher learn about lives of her students, short of moving in with each of them for a month, or conducting a two year community survey for each community represented in her classroom? How could my classrooms have become places to both celebrate and nurture the vast resources brought by Pao Joua Lo and Bao Xiong to their lives in the United States? Could the classroom where Chou Chang studied have been a place where he could gain more than only classroom success and an equivilency degree?

From problem-solving to celebration: discovering and creating meaning

Language and literacy classes are put together based on some kind of need: whether it is the need of a government for self-sufficient citizens who can be weaned from the welfare

rolls, the need of a business for workers who can communicate effectively, the need of a factory for workers who can read instructions for using machinery, etc. The success of the program will often depend on the degree to which the needs of the institution match the felt needs of the people who are targetted for training.

There are also many examples of classes that have been created based on the needs of community members who pursue their own purposes. Culture classes and native language literacy classes provided by Philadelphia's Hmong Association grew from it's members' self-articulated needs. In the craft project cited in footnote #5, the language curriculum and the class itself grew from needs of a particular group of women who wanted to learn language to accomplish a specific set of tasks for a concrete (non-linguistic) end. Whether the primary thrust comes from an outside institution or from the self-defined needs of the community, program planners and curriculum designers are responsible for the groundwork in creating meaningful language contexts for learning language and literacy. This requires input from both the institutions and the non-native speakers being served by language programs.

The next level where meaningful contexts for literacy acquisiton can be created is at the level of the classroom by the language teacher. Ideally, teachers should be enabled to observe the settings in which her students need to navigate through the creative planning of administrators and program designers. This

is increasingly the case, for example, when teachers are invited to observe and analyse work settings, or to work with content-area teachers for assisting students in adjusting to mainstream language classes. I propose that in adult literacy classes, observation in the community is also especially useful. Teachers who attend New Year's festivals, ethnic celebrations, or make family visits can begin to see not only what her students don't have, but the cultural riches that they do bring with them. She can get a sense of the other parts of the world that her students' inhabit in their life outside of her classroom walls.

In a setting that is extremely heterogeneous, or where "hanging out" in the community is not possible, the first thing that a teacher can do, is to invite her students to teach her about their world by <u>reporting</u> it to her and to others. Students themselves can become investigators of language and literacy by keeping diaries of their own language use, and reporting and reflecting on it. What language do they use with whom and when? What do they read and write? How is language used in the workplace, in their own homes? What do they want to be able to say, to be able to read and write?

Language and literacy are not only the objects of study, but rather also the medium through which other problems are solved and relationships are negotiated. The challenge for teachers is to find a way for giving students the means to identify those problems and to reflect on those relationships. One way that is especially powerful is to ask students <u>to repond</u> to the

experiences of others. Collections of essays from more advanced students or interviews of newcomers can be a powerful stimulous for students to reflect on ways in which their own experiences are similar or different. No matter how diverse the makeup of a language class, by being a non-native speaker, students have certain experiences in common: i.e. memories of other places, dealing with two cultural worlds, adjusting to life in a new setting, making difficult choices about tradition and change. These are issues that follow students to their school classrooms, their workplaces and their families as they interact with compatricts, classmates, neighbors, co-workers and kin. The stories and writings of others inevitably hit on issues which are part of the human migratory experience, encouraging readers and listeners to reflect on their own experiences, their own choices, their own relationships. These reflections can be developed in discussion or in written text - providing further stimulous, this time from the experiences of the participants.

Finally, teachers can create in classrooms a setting where students speak and write for real audiences. A teacher and classmates are one obvious audience. In an assignment to "write a letter to Ann Landers", one young woman wrote of her dilemma when asked out by an American boy. "My American heart tells me to do as I please", she wrote, "but my Vietnamese heart tells me to obey my parents. What should I do?" A follow-up activity of answering the letters from classmates became a collective listening and supporting exercise. The classroom is a place

where students can create a community that will examine their struggles, share experiences and provide support for seeking solutions.

Classrooms can also be places where students work together to create text for other audiences. Elders participating in Project LEIF[7] have found that despite their differences, all share a concern about their relationships with their grandchildren. In response to the question "What do you want your grandchildren to know about (your native country), a new motivation has been created for telling stories, for getting them in writing, and for putting them in a form that can be read and saved by real readers for real purposes. Teachers can be a source of linguistic information, while classmates can be a source of stimulous, feedback and editorial support. One innovative tutor has asked the family he works with, "what do you want the people in the camps to know about America?" He has plied them with a camera, asking that they take pictures that they feel best tell the story. Choosing what to photograph, labelling and explaining the pictures will be a collective project, ending with a product that will be sent to relatives in the camps (Andrew Atzert, personal communication).

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[7] Project LEIF, Learning English through Intergenerational Friendship is a community based program in which volunteers are trained to work with refugee elders at a Camboidan Buddhist Temple, a center for ethnic Chinese, a Hispanic Senior Center and a multi-cultural center in Philadelphia. For more details, see Weinstein-Shr 1989b.

Classrooms can be places where students find out how to say or write things that will enable them to solve problems, to overcome obstacles and to "make it" in a new setting. But they can also be places where they find teachers and classmates who solicit and listen to experiences: what people are good at, what they are concerned about, what brings them grief or joy. The class can also be a place to develop a new and expanded sense of possible audiences- neighbors, teachers, bosses, parents, younger siblings. Language can be a medium not only for surviving, but also for listening, explaining, remembering, celebrating.

Newcomers come to our shores with other ways of seeing and experiencing the world. As we become allies in helping them to articulate and document those views and experiences for us, for classmates, families and communities, we become learners and travellers in the most exciting sense of the adventure. As a result, we are likely to discover along the way the most meaningful ways that we can use our own linguistic skills and knowledge to pay for the ride.

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Table I. Functions and Uses of Literacy for Chou Chang

USE	FUNCTION	ROLE
translations of & Bible lessons	mediate between culture groups	mediator and culture bridge
forms to negotiate w/ new institutions	secure econ. benefits	self helper
help non-lits with Lit-related tasks	change role in social order	literacy broker

Table II. Functions and Uses of Literacy for Pao Youa Lo

USE	FUNCTION	ROLE
scrapbooks	celebrate leaders	professional soldier
chronicles expert	document past	history
news articles	keep informed on on world news	news expert
correspondence	keep connected w/Laos	authority on Laos
notes-culture classes	learn about tradition	authority on family matters

Table III. Functions and Uses of Literacy for Bao Xiong:

USE	FUNCTION	ROLE
business cards	increase sales	culture packager and broker
flyers	and	
guest book	expand business	saleswoman

Table IV. Problem-Solving and Networks: Norton vs. Weston

NORTON	WESTON
interact with real and fictive kin	report isolation from kin
solve problems within household or clan	seek help from Americans in solving problems
networks:	networks:
mostly Hmong	include Americans
highly dense	little overlap
multiplex	single roles
informal	institutional

Chart I. Network Chart of Chou Chang

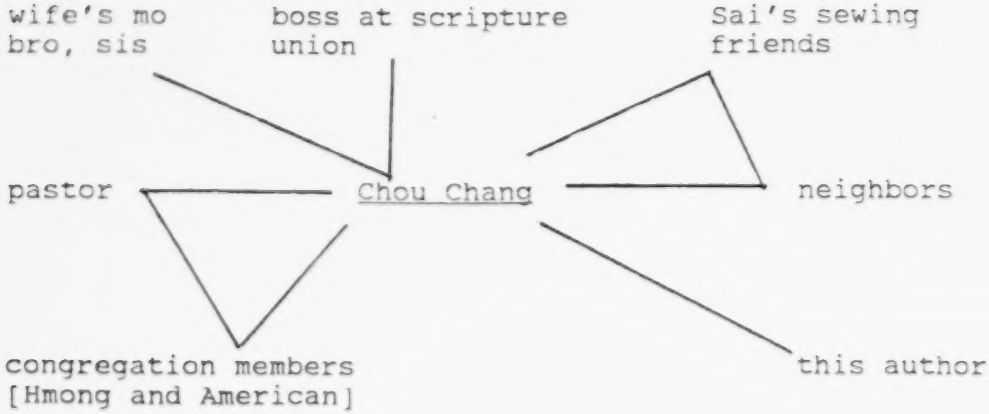

Chart II. Network Chart of Pao Youa Lo

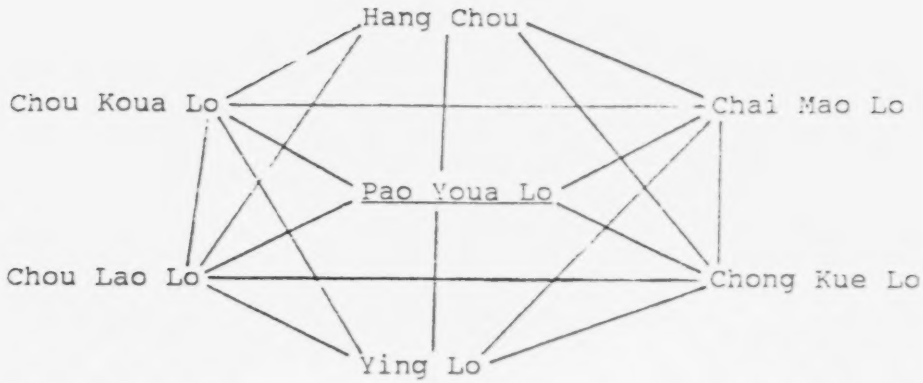

Chart III. Network Chart for Bao Xiong